In recent years analysts of our culture have dubbed our era as the Age of Anxiety. Rightly defined anxiety is a fear that does not comprehend the object of which it is afraid; it is an uncomfortable uneasiness, a restlessness that cannot pin point the object that is repelling: it is a longing for meaning. Allowed to exist and to grow unchecked anxiety is responsible for a neurotic condition. Psychiatrist's offices are filled with people who have asked the big question, "What is the meaning of life?" and having asked have discovered to their distress that they have no answer. They feel like a piece of wood drifting on the surf, bobbing up and down with the swells, with no course, no direction--just aimless drifting and bobbing until it disolves and sinks to the bottom.

Why has this era been called the Age of Anxiety? How are we different from men in the past--why should our anxiety be more severe than anyone else's? Essentially our anxieties, our condition, are no different from that of men from all ages, however, there are aspects about our life now in the twentieth century that have exaggerated and enlarged our anxieties. To attempt to define and describe the roots of anxiety in 20th Century America would be to tackle a mammoth task, one which demands more ability and time than I have at present. But there are a few items that bear mentioning, items that we frequently overlook because of their obvious presence.

We live in an age that has seen time honored standards wiped out, we are part of a civilization that has seen its entire conception of life and the world (Weltenschauung) changed in a very few years. Not long ago men looked into the sky and saw tiny stars twinkling, so close that one could almost reach up and touch them. The moon seemed to smile down in pleasant benevolence on our

earth that was obviously the high point, if not the center of the entire universe. It was a comfortable feeling, no one spent much time thinking about space, time and matter. The sky was simply filled with delightful objects and it made men happy. Today we cannot pick up a newspaper without being aware that someone has shot a rocket into that space, that the nearest star is so many million light years away, that we inhabit a universe that is not a stable comfortable phenomenon but one that is constantly exploding outward, traveling at an unimaginable speed into black nothingness. There are no beginnings, no ends--just strings of figures that are too large for us to comprehend. The more we think of it the more uncomfortable we feel, a fear has been ignited in each one of us, a fear that has no object, a fear born out of the unknown. This is a condition that simply did not both men one hundred or two hundred years ago and in looking for the reasons why this is the age of anxiety we must give it a prominent place.

As a nation we have been the victims of great disillusionment. Democracy and America was the result of man's fondest dream, a truly egalitarian society with complete freedom for all. It was the epitome of man's struggle against enslavement, surely all the nations would look to America and begin immediately to create a democratic world. Everyone of us here has seen that fond hope shattered again and again. In 1914 and again in 1941 millions of people have demonstrated their utter abhorence of anything Democratic. And now we have witnessed a political system arise that is the direct antithesis to democracy. A political system that claims that it is the way and the only way, a system that predicts that it will envelope the world and which has done much to fulfill

that prediction in the past sixteen years. At this moment students parade carrying banners that cry out "Yankee No;" ink stains adorn our embassies, we are slowly recognising that the words America and Democracy awaken hatred and violence in the hearts of a great portion of mankind. How can this be? we ask. If this is so what possible meaning does life hold? If the world rejects this our fondest hope and dream can there be any answers to life's questions?

At home in individual day to day life things have changed, the values and standards of one hundred years ago are lost forever. Not long ago a man found meaning and satisfaction in his work; his crops grew before his eyes and fed his family, his ownability created his home and its furnishings--there was true meaning in this way of life. Today that source of meaning has been reduced to turning a bolt on an assembly line, or sitting behind a desk working on one stage of a process that is hidden behind miles of paper and pencils. What meaning is there for the man who spends an hour and a half driving to work, eight hours working on paper forms, another hour and a half dirving home? There is no product to complete, no finishing touches to add to the work of ~~one's~~ his own hands, just endless monotony. What meaning can there be we ask? If this is it until we retire, if our short seventy odd years on earth have nothing more to offer than this--life is empty, life is meaningless indeed.

So far I have been talking about the way in which we have been forced to ask the big question: and the specific reasons why this has been called the age of anxiety. But we are not alone--men have been asking about the meaning

of life for time eternal. Perhaps our anxieties are greater but essentially we are faced with the same issue that men have tried to resolve for ages; the same issue that bothered the writer of the ninetieth Psalm.

Too frequently we think of the Psalter as merely pretty poetry, suitable for funerals and for inspiration when we are depressed. But here in the 90th Psalm we hear a man and a community taking the Bull by the horns and asking the question of life's meaning. The 90th Psalm is a communal lament, an act of worship that was performed at a time of crises--perhaps a military defeat or a famine or drought--or it may have been performed yearly at a specified time. It expresses a familiar thought, it's subject is man's insignificance in contrast to God's greatness. With clarity and beauty the Psalmist laments the apparent meaningless of human life.

Life is like dust, that is here one moment and the next is blown away. It settles temporarily but is lifted up and swirls out of sight. Life is like a blade of grass--that is fresh and new, glistening in the wetness of morning--but which fades as the heat of the day blisters on it and is withered by evening. Life is like a dream, the fleeting, cloudy world in which we participate while sleeping--but which we can never quite recreate in the morning. At best life will last seventy or eighty years--this the Psalmist sees in relation to God's agelessness and eternity. In God's sight a thousand years are like yesterday when it is past--the amount of time occupied by yesterday--today seems very insignificant. Or again a thousand years are like a watch in the night--three brief hours of sleep. In this way the Psalmist addresses the insignificance of humanity, the fleeting transitoriness of all life. This is truly a lament, a sobering reflection on the meaning of life.

But man's short term existence is not the only reason for lamenting--there is more still. For man manages to fill his brief years with sin, strife, hatred and trouble. As if it isn't bad enough to live life so very briefly--we must make matters worse by filling that period with our own evil. "How Long, O Lord?" cries the Psalmist. "What does all this mean? Is there any meaning to this suffering, these insignificant seventy years that at best only show toil and trouble?"

This is not time worn piety, but a cogent statement of our anxieties. In our case these same questions of the meaning of life have been magnified by the destruction of standard values and a new social order--and therefore we find Psalm 90 speaking directly to our problem. Although the psalmist laments his predicament he has an answer provided by his faith in God. And so the lament is also prayer, a prayer that is born out of the confidence of faith. In effect the Psalmist gives the answer before he states the question. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hast formed the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Thou has been our dwelling place; the natural residence of the human soul is in God, the creator. This is the answer that underlies the Psalmist's lamenting question about the brevity of life. Life is short and filled with sweat and toil, sin and struggle; at times it makes one wonder what it all means. And yet the Psalmist knows--the Lord has been God even before the mountains were created and He has been man's dwelling place and refuge in all generations. The Lord God provides the shelter in the storm, it is he who gives meaning to our brief frail existence. This realization was salvation for the psalmist, knowing this he could bear anything that might

occur in his life time. He knew that ultimately his dwelling place was in God; this meaning provided him relief from anxiety. Even though he might lament the answer was known.

Perhaps you think that the question of life's meaning is only a philosophical or theological question, that it concerns you not in the least. The reason I spent time describing anxiety and the conditions that have made us ask that question was to show how important is is to each one of us. We live in a world that forces us to ask "What is the meaning of life?"--and at the same time we live in a world that is stingy with answers. We cannot escape it--it crops up at us at every turn; we can turn from it and try to avoid it or, like the Psalmist we can wrestle with it in the faith that there is an answer to be found in Almighty God.

As I have said, everyman that thinks at all asks this question sooner or later in his own way. It may not be worded directly "What is the meaning of life--my life?" but nevertheless the issue at sometime presents itself in our minds. And likewise everyman will find an answer--a valid one or perhaps a cheap substitute. The junior executive who cannot find meaning in the position as a cog in a giant corporation mechanism may find refuge from his plight in his cocktails. The business world is filled with men who cannot stand a meaningless existence, performing a meaningless job in a meaningless process that functions in a meaningless world and who find (or rather avoid) the answer to the ultimate question in a bottle. Sexual promiscuity for many helps ease the agony of a life devoid of meaning and value. The drug addict,

the alcoholic, the prostitute--have all discovered convenient means of escaping the apparent emptiness of their lives.

But these are exceptions we say, we certainly are involved in none of the above. But I remind you that the question arises to all of us--and in our own way we provide an answer or a substitute. Many of us find meaning in life in a whirl of activities, busy work, the void is filled by being president of this--secretary of that. We work compulsively in our clubs--or in our church, desperately attempting to find something ultimate, something we can lay our hands on, something we can call true meaning.

We can try to find the answer to the question of life in our occupations, putting our all into the job, losing ourselves in our work.

We can attempt to find meaning in dedicating ourselves to doing good--surely ~~there's~~ meaning is there!

But the Psalmist draws us back. All these things are fine--but they do not provide true meaning. They serve as a temporary substitute--a filler, but eventually we are brought to the realization that they too, like life, are merely temporal, limited by time and space; transient and temporary like the dream and the blade of grass. These substitutes do not save us from the anxiety that has become the hallmark of our generation. If anything, because they are substitutes, they only increase our anxiety when we realize that we have been operating under an illusion, when we realize that our refuge is only a replacement for that which is real.

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." This is an answer that does not appear to even be taken seriously by our culture. That

the Lord God Almighty, who has created us and sustains us is also the source of life's meaning does not seem to be an alternative. The Psalmist knew before he asked and we do well to heed his words. In an anxiety ridden world we are invited to find meaning in a God who is all powerful, who has brought us forth in loving creation, whose eternity stands alone. There is nothing else that is infinite and eternal; everything--our lives, our desires and dreams--all fade and wither like the blade of grass. God alone is ultimate, he alone is the source of life's meaning.

As Christians, by being here this morning, we affirm that this we know and believe, we testify that we have found meaning in our God. Thusly we must put this trust into operation, placing proper significance in that which is temporal--and that which is eternal. We know that life has meaning, that there are answers to our questions--that in God we may find our refuge.

--Lord--Thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.

Amen.